

THE CHILI STANDING ROCKS, TUSCARAWAS COUNTY, OHIO

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Introduction. An old real-photo postcard dated 1909 and mailed from Fresno, Coshocton Co., Ohio, recently appeared on e-Bay. It shows a large, ca. 30-foot-tall natural rock pillar and is labeled "Standing Rock, Chili, O., Photo by King" (Figure 1). Initial inquiries of several archaeologists familiar with this area of Coshocton and Tuscarawas Co. proved negative, although James Morton told me of Chili Fort, a semicircular enclosure lying along the west fork of White Eyes Creek, about a half mile south of Chili (Figure 2). Aerial photos nicely reveal the outline of the earthen enclosure and large blocks of sandstone lying below it but nothing that could be identified as a rock pillar. The field encompassing the fort and an adjacent rock shelter were examined by SAO members Leonard Brown, Wayne Mortine, and others in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The material was donated to the Tuscarawas Branch of Kent State University but has not been examined. Photographs provided by Morton indicate a multicomponent site or sites ranging from Paleo-Indian to Late Prehistoric in time. Unfortunately, very little context has been preserved.

The Chili Rock Pillars. About a mile and a half east of Chili (pronounced like-jai alai), on the main branch of White Eyes Creek is Chili Station (Pearl P. O.), a stop on the abandoned Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad, now better known as Pearl and home of the Pearl Valley Cheese Factory. A recent visit here resulted in immediate recognition of the picture by a local resident who gave directions to the site, along a narrow ridgetop about two miles further east of Chili Station (Pearl), north of Township Road 90 and just east of the Coshocton-Tuscarawas County line.

This narrow ridgetop actually trends east-west and straddling the county line. The land to the east, in Tuscarawas Co., is owned by Kimble Clay and Limestone, which has recently drilled along the ridge in order to test the underlying Middle Kittanning (No. 6) coal, about 60-80 below the hilltop. The western end of the ridge, including an estimated 80 per cent of the largest of the standing stones, is on the former William E. Wilson farm, a 282 acre tract that sold at auction last June for nearly \$950,000.

Hiking along the narrow sandstone ridge about a half mile revealed three pillars or standing stones weathered from highly cross-bedded sandstones of the lower Conemaugh Group (Lamborn 1954, 1958). The easternmost pillar (Figure 3) is

about 15 feet high and can be seen from the township road below, if you know where to look for it. Examination of the sandy soil around the base of the pillar revealed only a few amber beer bottle fragments and no flint chippage or other indications of prehistoric activity.

A narrow access road extends about halfway between the easternmost rock pillar and the western end of the ridge before plunging steeply down the northern hillside. From this point there is only a recent access path associated with the coal test holes along the ridgetop. This path stops just short of the central standing stone, which is bulkier but shorter and less impressive than the other two (Figure 4). The unusual feature associated with it is a prominent erosional "window" in the base (Figure 5). A large recess on the upper side of this window is large enough and might be dry enough to serve for shelter but no flint chippage, charcoal, or other signs of human were noted in the bare areas.

Drilling activity did expose the thin, sandy topsoil along the ridge and cursory inspection recovered several flint flakes, including two of light gray Upper Mercer flint and a small pinkish-gray flake that might be either Flint Ridge or Upper Mercer. A larger (5 cm) block fragment of light gray Upper Mercer flint also occurred. Both it and a cobble fragment of Huronian tillite appeared to have several bipolar flake scars. The cobble fragment was probably discarded as being too small and/or too tough to be readily utilizable (Figure 6). While temporally non-diagnostic and not directly relatable to any of the three Chili standing stones, this artifact material is significant in that its proximity to the central and western standing stones makes it extremely likely that these rock features were known in prehistoric times.

The westernmost of the three Chili standing stones is the rock pillar shown in the 1909 post card and in Figure 1A stands on the line between Crawford Township, Coshocton Co., and Buck Township, Tuscarawas Co.. The log snake fence shown in the post card view is long gone but has been replaced by a metal wire fence. The pillar is estimated to be ca. 30 feet high. The small amount of sandy soil exposed around its base did not reveal any traces of prehistoric activity. A few historic graffiti (initials), mostly relatively recent carvings, can be seen but no dates.

This rock pillar is not included in Snyder's recent survey of Ohio rock pillars, unless it is the one referred to as the "Bal-

tic Pedestal Rock" (Snyder 2010: 326-327, 333), but locating it "east of the town of Baltic" would be misleading, as it is actually about five miles south of Baltic.

Conclusions. The tallest of the three Chili rock pillars is as impressive today as it was one hundred years ago and must have been during prehistoric times. As it can not be seen from the valley of White Eyes Creek, it would be difficult to claim it as a trail marker, although the presence of modest flint and "hardstone" debitage along the ridgetop, within 400 feet of the most prominent of the rock pillars, strongly suggests that this striking geological feature was known in prehistoric times.

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References

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Figure 1. Sepia Real-Photo Postcard of Chili Standing Rock Dated 1909.



Figure 3. Eastern Chili Standing Rock.



Figure 2.
Aerial Photo Showing
Chili Earthworks (semicircle),
Coshocton County, Ohio.



Figure 4. Central Standing Stone, Looking East.



Figure. Westernmost Chili Standing Rock Looking Northeast.



Figure 5. Erosional Window on North Side of Central Standing Stone.



Figure 6. Flint Flakes and Bipolar Flint and Tillite Cores.